

Paper presentation on women empowerment



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For more than a decade' the term 'empowerment' has been widely used in relation to women as well as marginalized community in India, Today one hears this term much more often than terms like women's welfare, upliftment, development are awareness rising . how ever , in spite of the growing popularity and widespread usage of the term, there have been few conceptual explorations of what exactly empowerment means, and even more, what the empowerment of women implies in social, economic and political terms.

Women's empowerment is a global issue today and discussion on women's political rights are at the fore front many formal and informal campaigns world wide. Empowerment in its simplest form means “ the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance” . becoming powerful is the literal meaning of the term 'empowerment'. These are being used today in spears of life as a process to strengthen the elements of society.

It is both processes as the results of the processes. It is transformation of the structures or Institutions that reinforces and perpetuates gender discrimination. Empowerment is the process that enables women to gain access to and control of materials as well as information resources, the empowerment approach was first clearly articulated in 1985 by Development Alternatives with Women capital for a new era (DAWN).

This term received prominence in early 90's in western countries.

Empowerment is the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power. The goals of Women's

empowerment are to challenge patriarchal ideology to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality and to enable poor women to gain access to and control of both material and informational resources.

It can change existing power relations by addressing itself to the three dimensions of material, human and intellectual resources. Empowerment cannot occur as a revolution but only as evolution. Appointing a committee on the status of women in India in 1971, the report of towards Equality (1974) which finally led to the preparation of the National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000. This plan puts together almost all that Women have aspired for and what has been formally promised to them.

Though the plan claimed to provide an alternate strategy of national development, so far as the upliftment of women and their emancipation are concerned, -1- it was admitted that no additional financial outlays were proposed for programmes specifically designed for upliftment of women, who are supposed to be woven into the social fabric in what was called an Integrated National Developmental Strategy.

In the then prevailing social, economic and political environment when there was no commitment on the part of the political and administrative machinery such a tall claim and any expectations on that basis appeared to be misplaced. The report of the National Commission for self-employed women and women in the informal sector also authenticated many realities about the conditions and contributions of women in this sector. NGO's working with women gained much strength and confidence from this report.

The appointment of the National Commission for Women (NCW) in 1992 and the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) in 1993 are part of the overall strategy of an integrated approach to empowerment of women adopted by the government in the nineties. Approaches to Women's Empowerment

Women's Empowerment according to Kamala Bhasin involved the main transformation of power relations at six different levels, namely individual, family, group, organization, village, community and society. In order to empower the rural poor especially the women, female workers must first empower themselves.

Batilwala has identified three approaches to women's empowerment : the integrated development approach, which focused on women's survival and livelihood needs; the economic development approach, which aimed to women's economic position; and the consciousness approach, which organized women into collectives that address the source of oppression. The consciousness raising approach asserts that women's empowerment requires awareness of the complex factors causing women's subordination.

This approach organized women into collectives that tackle the sources of subordination (ASTHA, Deccan Development Society, Mahila Samakhya, WOP in India, and Nigera Kori in Bangladesh). The Female empowerment approach stresses the capacity of women to increase their self reliance and internal strength. The empowerment approach to women's advancement in developing countries recognizes that the patriarchal structure of subordination must be addressed through women's organizations at the grass- root level.

Such local groups can facilitate bottom up change by providing a social mechanism to raise women's consciousness about their subordination. Broad categories of Empowerment Empowerment can be broadly categorized as: *

- * Economic empowerment
- * Political empowerment
- * Social empowerment

Economic empowerment: Economic empowerment is undoubtedly the key and may lead to all other kinds of empowerment. This is truer in the context of women. A major cause of women's subordination is said to be her economic dependence. -2-

In the event of social crisis, a woman is unable to express or decide for herself mainly because she has no means to support herself and her children. It is precisely because of this that many women development programmes either emphasize fully or have a component on the income generation activity so that there is money available in women's hand and she moves towards economic independence and takes the first step towards empowerment. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) which is the main plank of poverty alleviation provides for 40 percent beneficiaries as women .

The programme of Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) again provides for forty percent trainees to women . Wage employment programmes such as Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) and Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) have also provided wage employment to women to the extent of forty percent . Then the exclusive programme on Development of women and children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) provides income generating activities to women. Political empowerment: Till the end of the nineteenth century women in India were crushed under the weight of evil customs.

They were socially suppressed, economically dependent and politically powerless. Politically women were less conscious, less articulate, and less active. They were basically apathetic and indifferent towards the political process. However, women with elite background and political families always found it easy and had a smooth entry in politics. Women's traditional role demanded full attention to home.